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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000687

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, AND EUR/SCE, NSC FOR BRAUN, USUN FOR
DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI, USOSCE FOR STEVE STEGER

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [UNMIK](#) [YI](#) [KV](#)

SUBJECT: KOSOVO ELECTIONS: 64 PARTIES, INCLUDING SOME SMALL
SERB PARTIES, SUBMIT CANDIDATE LISTS ON TIME

REF: PRISTINA 668

Classified By: COM TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: After extending the deadline twice, the Central Elections Commission (CEC) received applications late September 12 from 64 political parties, coalitions, citizens' initiatives and independent candidates for the November 17 elections at the central and municipal levels. Albanian party wrangling over coalitions and candidates continued at a fever pitch right up to the deadline, with several late-breaking changes to the lists. A total of eight Serb political entities - six on the central level, two on the local level - have registered despite Belgrade's call for a boycott on September 13. While the northern hardliners will likely join Belgrade in rejecting Serb participation, moderates tell us that Serbs need to vote, at least in order to avoid undesirable participants (such as former Returns Minister Slavisa Petkovic) from taking office. In a last minute piece of bad news, the negative Belgrade stance on Kosovo Serb participation has evidently prompted Serb moderate Oliver Ivanovic to reconsider his party's engagement in elections, and he has confirmed to USOP that his party will not register for central elections. END SUMMARY.

12. (U) The Central Election Commission (CEC) Secretariat received applications from 50 political entities for municipal elections and 36 for mayoral elections. Twenty-five entities applied for the Kosovo Assembly, down from 32 in the 2004 elections, before the five percent threshold for Albanian parties was introduced. Party presidents Fatmir Sejdiu, Ramush Haradinaj, Hashim Thaci, and Nexhat Daci top the candidates lists of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK), Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), and LDK offshoot party, the Democratic League of Dardania (LDD), respectively.

FIVE PERCENT THRESHOLD INSPIRES COALITIONS

13. (SBU) With the parliamentary threshold set at a relatively high five percent, both the two largest parties, LDK and PDK, and the LDD picked up candidates from the smaller parties. The two current Christian Democratic Party MPs divided their loyalties between the LDK and LDD. LDK

also picked up support from the Albanian National Democratic Party (PNDSh). Bujar Bukoshi, a former shadow government Prime Minister who left the LDK years ago to form the New Party of Kosovo (PREK), returned to the fold. Solo Liberal Party (PLK) MP Gjergj Dedaj joined the PDK list, as did Social Democrat (PSDK) Kaqusha Jashari and Democratic Alternative of Kosovo (ADK, founded by LDK defectors) president Edita Tahiri.

14. (SBU) After much discussion, the moderate Islamic Justice Party (PD) did not join forces with wealthy Swiss emigre businessman Bexhet Pacolli's New Kosovo Alliance (AKR) party and will likely lose its Assembly seat as a result. Both AKR and Veton Surroi's ORA party decided to go it alone and did not join forces with any other political entity, but did run some civil society figures. Of the E.O.-listed radical parties and individuals, LKCK is on its own and unlikely to meet the threshold, but LPK's Emrush Xhemajli joined PDK and is high on the list. However, ideological cohorts and fringe PDK MPs Nait Hasani and Hydajet Hyseni are much lower on the PDK list than in 2004 (#39 and #42 rather than #22 and #13).

SO YOU WANT TO BE A MAYOR?

15. (C) This first direct election of mayors has attracted the parties' most high-profile members and inspired the ruling LDK party to do some weeding of its list to stay competitive.

Peja mayor Ali Lajci (LDK), known to us for his unhelpful behavior regarding the Serb Orthodox Pec Patriarchate in his municipality, will not run again. And, after much intra-party debate, the LDK put forward President Sejdiu adviser Isa Mustafa for Pristina mayor rather than allowing unpopular Ismet Beqiri to run for another term. PDK's Fatmir

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Limaj, a popular figure widely seen as PDK president Hashim Thaci's chief rival, is also running for Pristina mayor. Other mayoral highlights include Sami Lushtaku (PDK) for Skenderaj mayor, Jakup Krasniqi (PDK) for Drenas mayor, former PDK PM Bajram Rexhepi for Mitrovica mayor, and respected MP Enver Hoxhaj for mayor of Suhareke. (NOTE: The LDK has won control of Pristina every year since 1999. If history is any guide, LDK will take Mitrovica and Suhareke, but PDK will win in their strongholds of Drenas and Skenderaj. Lushtaku and Limaj are both E.O.-listed. END NOTE.) The reformist ORA party put forward popular MPs Teuta Sahatqija and Gazmend Muhaxherri for mayor of Gjakove and Peja, respectively.

SOME SERBS IN THE GAME...

16. (SBU) Also by the September 12 deadline, five Serb parties had thrown their hats into the ring, with a smaller number of groups also looking to participate at the local level. The list includes Slobodan Petrovic's Independent Liberal Party (SLS), Returns Minister Branimir Stokich's New Democracy Party (ND), Dragisa Miric's Serbian Kosovo and Metohija Party (SKMS), the newly-formed Alliance of Independent Social Democrats of Kosovo and Metohija (SNSDKIM), and the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats of Kosovo and Metohija, led by former Returns Minister Slavisa Petkovic, who is still active in politics despite being forced to resign from the government after he was implicated in an embezzlement scandal.

...DESPITE DISCOURAGEMENT

17. (C) Belgrade announced its official discouragement of Serb participation in Kosovo central elections September 13, in a government statement declaring that "basic conditions for the safe and free life of Serbs have not been secured" in Kosovo. Northern hardline leader Marko Jaksic said September 12 that "Kosovo Serbs should not be interested much in Kosovo local and parliamentary elections." SNC North leader Milan Ivanovic told ICO representative James Nunan the same on September 12, and also noted to UNMIK Mitrovica

representative Gerry Gallucci on the same day that he and other hardliners would meet "soon" to issue a joint statement against Serb participation. It does not appear that the Serbian Orthodox Church (SOC) will join the calls for a boycott; SOC insider Maria Gavric told poloff September 14 that Bishop Artemije, though opposed to elections in principle, will likely refrain from making any statement on the subject.

IVANOVIC NOT RUNNING, BUT CONSIDERS PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT

¶18. (C) Despite his criticism of fellow Serbs who discourage Serb participation in Kosovo elections - and his statement to COM September 10 that he would participate "no matter what" Belgrade says - Oliver Ivanovic announced September 14 that his party, the Serbian List for Kosovo and Metohija (SLKM), would not participate. Ivanovic, one of the most high-profile Kosovo Serb politicians, cited the lack of support from Belgrade as the deciding factor. Ivanovic told us that Belgrade's blessing would be important to avoid the election of "idiots" like former Minister for Returns Petkovic, a sentiment that has been seconded by many Serbs in recent days. On September 9, SNC Gracanica head Rada Trajkovic appeared on Serb media, warning that Serbs would lose political power in the southern Serb-majority municipalities of Strpce and Novo Brdo if they boycotted elections, adding that Kosovo is "not only the northern municipalities," and that Serbs in the south should have stronger support from Belgrade.

¶19. (C) There may have been other factors involved in Ivanovic's last-minute decision not to participate. Ivanovic reported that CCK observers monitored his meetings in the Serb-majority area of Partes (current Gnjilane/Gjilan municipality) as he was finalizing the SLKM electoral list, and that a potential candidate in Ranilug had been so

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unnerved by Belgrade pressure that he might not run. He also told us that SLKM Assembly member Vesna Jovanovic was particularly nervous about her participation due to pressure from Belgrade.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: Despite initial grumbling by some Kosovo Albanian parties about holding elections before resolution of Kosovo's final status, all have now accepted that central and municipal elections will happen on November 17 and have gotten their candidate lists in on time. First-ever open candidate lists and direct election of mayors have forced the parties to put forth popular (and hopefully more accountable) figures on their candidate lists. Regarding Kosovo Serbs, Oliver Ivanovic's decision not to participate was a disappointment, but we will continue to encourage Serbs to participate in the elections in any event. Next steps in the elections process are the vetting of candidates and the effort to educate voters on the complicated 5-ballot process.

END COMMENT.
KAIDANOW